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ABSTRACT

In a time of financial difficulties for schools, few counselors use accountability practices--practices which are necessary in order to justify the expense of school counseling and guidance programs. This descriptive study examines opinions of adults about school counselors. Following a review of literature concerning the role of the counselor, a survey was created and administered to 40 participants. According to the results, counselors are seen in a positive light, although certain responses indicated some areas of concern. Of those surveyed, 42 percent agreed that school counselors spend most of their time handling student scheduling while 62 percent stated that the majority of the counselor's time is spent on paperwork. Twenty-five percent of the participants indicated that they had never seen their school counselor. While this survey produced results more positive than anticipated, there is still reason for concern. Tax-paying adults still believe that school counselors spend most of their efforts on paperwork and scheduling, leaving little time for students. Until school counselors let the adults of their communities know what they are doing, and what services they provide, people will continue to record negative views of counselor services. A copy of the survey appears in an appendix. (RJM)

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ED 378 472

Adult Attitudes About School Counselor Role

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Abstract

What are adult attitudes about school counselors? Adults, as taxpayers, support schools. Do counselors know what adults believe to be the focus of the school counselor's role in schools? This brief study indicates that a large percentage of the forty participants in this study believe that counselors spend the majority of their time doing scheduling and paperwork. Following a review of literature concerning the role of the counselor, a survey was created and administered. Participants also were asked to indicate reasons for which they had seen a counselor as a student. 25% of participants indicated that they had never seen their counselor. Other valuable information and implications for counselors are included.

Adult Attitudes About School Counselor Role

In a time of financial difficulty for schools, few counselors are engaging in accountability practices (Fairchild & Zins, 1986). Such practices are necessary in order to justify that school counseling and guidance programs are worth the expense. Accountability practices also indicate to the counselor which services are adequate, and can be used to measure attitudes about services.

For the most part, counselors are engaged in activities other than counseling for most of the day (Ibrahim, Helms & Thompson, 1983). This may be due to counselors not having a clear idea of what their role in the school is to be (Hutchinson & Bottorff, 1986), or schools being administered in ways incompatible with counseling goals (Tennyson, Miller, Skovholt & Williams, 1989). How counselors actually spend their time and how they believe their time should be spent are

incongruent (Hutchinson, Barrick & Groves, 1986).

Adults and students also see that school counselors, in many cases, are doing tasks other than counseling and guidance services (Tennyson, Miller, Skovholt & Williams, 1989). Rowe (1989), found that discussion of personal problems of high school seniors with the school counselor were almost nonexistent, and that nearly 20% of the college freshmen surveyed responded that they did not see their counselor to discuss post-high school decisions. According to Gibson (1990), approximately 38% of the counselor's time is spent don't administrative and clerical tasks compared to only 29% of the time being devoted to counseling.

What do adults, as taxpayers and consumers of schools, think about school counselors? According to adults, how are school counselors spending their time? The results of this study may indicate that more needs to be done in the areas of accountability and public relations to educate the consumers

of school about what is actually being done for students.

Method

This is a descriptive study, used to determine opinions of adults about school counselors. The questionnaire used to gather data consisted of 17 items to which participants were asked to rate the statements as Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree. After a review of literature devoted to describing the role of the school counselor, statements were created pertaining to the role of school counselors, and how school counselors spend the majority of their time. Participants were also asked to list reasons they saw their counselor when they were students, if at all.

A sample of convenience, one readily available to the researcher, was used. Forty participants responded to the questionnaire, 14 males and 26 females. Age of participants

ranged from 22 years to 56 years. Participants represented a range of race, economic status and amount of education earned by the time of the survey.

Once all of the surveys were tabulated, a percentage was calculated for each category (Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree) for each of the seventeen statements. These percentages are shown in Table 1. For the section in which participants were asked to indicate the reasons, if any, that they had seen their counselor as a student, a count was taken for each of the reasons. Those numbers are presented in Table 2.

Results

According to the results of this survey, counselors are being seen in a more positive way, although there are still some areas of concern. 42% of the participants agreed that

school counselors spend most of their time doing scheduling of students. 62% of the participants agreed that the majority of the counselor's time is spent doing paperwork. Nearly 23% of the respondents agreed that counselors spend very little time with students. 25% disagreed with the statement that counselors possess competent counseling skills. A total of 35%, from the Disagree and Strongly Disagree categories, believe that counselors do not help parents understand their children. 35% believe that counselors are not knowledgeable about standardized tests and the results of those tests.

In other categories, however, counselors in schools fared quite well. 75% agreed or strongly agreed that counselors are available to help students with personal problems. 75% believe that school systems would benefit from having more counselors.

Of the forty participants, 10 responded that they had never seen the school counselor as a student. 20 responded

that they had visited the counselor for a schedule change. Most listed college (23/40) and career (18/40) information as reasons for seeing their counselor. Only 4 saw their counselor for personal problems. Fewer saw the counselor in a group counseling setting (3), and 2 were referred to their counselor for a behavior problem.

Discussion

While this survey produced results more positive than anticipated, there is still reason for concern. Adults, who pay the taxes to support schools, still believe that school counselors are doing paperwork and scheduling most of the time, leaving very little time for students.

According to Schmidt (1993), counselors are in schools not only to assist teachers and students, but to assist parents face the challenges of parenting in today's society. Yet a large

number of those surveyed for this project, 35%, do not feel that counselors help parents understand their children. It may be that these people do not know that counselors are available to them as well.

Again, though, the responsibility comes back to the counselor. Until school counselors let the adults of their communities know what they are doing, and what services they are available for, people will respond negatively.

Students, according to Hutchinson & Bottorff (1986), do not identify the school counselor as one to whom they can go with personal problems. Only 4 of the 40 participants in this survey indicated that they had seen the counselor for help with their services to students? Students would rather consult friends or even parents before consulting with a school counselor about a personal problem (Hutchinson & Bottorff, 1986). Wells and Ritter (1979) found that students would go to their counselor for a schedule change or to verify having

met the requirements for graduation, but those same students did not seek help from the counselor for personal problems. Respondents to another study agreed that counselors should have a closer student-counselor interaction (Ibrahim, Helms, & Thompson, 1983).

Gibson (1990) reported that the general public needs to be shown that school counseling programs make a positive difference. 88% of the respondents in this survey agreed that school counselors make a positive contribution to schools. However, comments made by participants indicate that more can be done to improve such programs. One participant commented, "I thought school counselors were only there for college advising." Another participant, commenting on the statement that counselors are available to help with personal problems, wrote,"They need to be more available!"

With such a small sample, the results of this study may not be generalized to all areas. The results do indicate,

however, that more can be done in the areas of informing the public about what counselors are doing for students and schools. What implications for counselors come as a result of this survey? Are counselors engaging in accountability practices that will serve to improve school guidance and counseling programs? Would a larger study be feasible for a school system to gauge the adult attitudes about school counselors in a specific community?

In a time of financial difficulty for schools, and a time of budget cuts, counselors must do everything in their power to justify their existence in the schools and the existence of school guidance and counseling programs. The future of the profession is in their hands.

Table 1
Responses to Survey as Percentages

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1. Have a demanding job	30.00%	43.00%	17.00%	10.00%
2. Do mostly scheduling	12.00%	42.00%	45.00%	0.00%
3. Salaries better used elsewhere	0.00%	10.00%	55.00%	35.00%
4. Takes no special training	0.00%	12.00%	30.00%	58.00%
5. Do mostly paperwork	0.00%	62.00%	38.00%	0.00%
6. Available for personal problems	17.00%	58.00%	25.00%	0.00%
7. Mostly check attendance	0.00%	5.00%	58.00%	37.00%
8. Make a positive contribution	45.00%	43.00%	10.00%	2.00%
9. Do mostly discipline	0.00%	5.00%	68.00%	27.00%
10. Spend little time with students	0.00%	22.50%	55.00%	22.50%
11. Students do not really benefit	0.00%	12.00%	38.00%	50.00%
12. Systems benefit from having more counselors	37.50%	37.50%	25.00%	0.00%
13. Possess competent counseling skills	12.00%	63.00%	25.00%	0.00%
14. Knowledgeable about standardized tests & results	25.00%	40.00%	33.00%	2.00%
15. Help parents understand their children	7.50%	57.50%	25.00%	10.00%
16. Do not provide essential services	0.00%	7.50%	50.00%	42.50%
17. Not needed in elementary schools	0.00%	12.00%	33.00%	55.00%

Table 2
Reasons For Seeing The Counselor by Number

	Number/40
Personal problem	4
Group counseling	3
Schedule change	20
Career information	18
College information	22
Behavior referral	2
Never saw counselor	10

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Appendix

This is a survey to determine adult attitudes about school counselors. Answer each statement based on your current opinion of school counselors. Following the statements, circle reasons you saw a counselor for as a student. It is important that you answer honestly. Your answers will remain anonymous.

Age_____
Sex_____

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
4	3	2	1

1. School counselors have a demanding job.	4 3 2 1
2. School counselors spend most of the time doing scheduling.	4 3 2 1
3. Salaries paid to school counselors would be better used elsewhere in the school system.	4 3 2 1
4. It takes no special training to be a school counselor	4 3 2 1
5. School counselors spend the majority of their time doing paperwork.	4 3 2 1
6. School counselors are available to help students with personal problems.	4 3 2 1
7. School counselors spend most of their time checking attendance.	4 3 2 1
8. School counselors make a positive difference in schools.	4 3 2 1
9. School counselors spend most of the time disciplining students.	4 3 2 1
10. School counselors spend very little time with students.	4 3 2 1
11. Students do not really benefit from having a counselor available.	4 3 2 1
12. School systems would benefit from having more counselors.	4 3 2 1
13. School counselors possess competent counseling skills.	4 3 2 1
14. School counselors are knowledgeable about standardized tests and the results of those tests.	4 3 2 1
15. School counselors help parents understand their children.	4 3 2 1
16. School counselors do not provide any	

essential services to schools. 4 3 2 1

17. School counselors are not needed in elementary schools. 4 3 2 1

CIRCLE ALL THAT APPLY.

As a student, I saw the counselor for the following:

Personal counseling Group counseling Schedule change
Career information College information Never saw counselor
Other (describe)_____